DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 770 JC 000 293

AUTHOR	Rifkin, Tronie
TITLE	Improving Articulation Policy To Increase Transfer. Policy Paper.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO. Center for Community College Policy.
SPONS AGENCY	Metropolitan Life Foundation.
REPORT NO	CC-00-5
PUB DATE	2000-02-00
NOTE	9p.; For other policy papers in this series, see JC 000 286-296.
AVAILABLE FROM	ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427 ($4). Tel: 303-299-3692. For full text: http://www.communitycollegepolicy.org/html/publications.htm.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Persistence; *Articulation (Education); Bachelors Degrees; *Community Colleges; *Educational Policy; Higher Education; Partnerships in Education; Policy Formation; Transfer Policy; *Transfer Programs; *Transfer Rates (College)

ABSTRACT

This paper, which focuses on articulation policy and transfer between community colleges and four-year institutions, is part of a series published by the Center for Community College Policy, designed to support state and local policymakers, as well as educational leaders who are interested in policy issues related to the two-year postsecondary sector. One of the oldest missions of the community college is to prepare students, who might not otherwise have had access, to transfer to, and be successful at, a four-year institution. There are numerous articulation policies regarding student transfer, yet many students enrolled in transfer-oriented programs do not realize their intent. If economic gains resulting from degree attainment are to become a reality for students, efficient transfer between institutions must be a part of the process. Troubling statistics indicate that students who initially enroll in a community college are less likely to complete their bachelor's degree than those who begin at four-year institutions. Several suggestions are offered for improving articulation and transfer, including: (1) streamlining articulation; (2) promoting collaboration; (3) fostering curriculum development; (4) bolstering student support services; (5) building technical support; and (6) providing for research and evaluation. The ultimate goal should be that a larger number of students seeking bachelor's degrees attain their objective, especially those whose only viable option for entry into higher education is to begin at a community college. (AF)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

POLICY Paper

February 2000

IMPROVING ARTICULATION POLICY TO INCREASE TRANSFER

by Tronie Rifkin

ED 439 770

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. F. Walker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

TC000243

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have multiple missions. One of the oldest is to provide college freshman- and sophomore-level education to students ultimately seeking bachelor's degrees who might not otherwise have access to higher education. The success of this mission depends upon the smooth and efficient transfer of students and their academic credits to and from two- and four-year colleges and universities.

Despite a number of articulation policies aimed at helping community college students transfer to four-year institutions, many students enrolled in transfer-oriented programs either do not pursue a bachelor's degree or experience problems in the process. Given the social and economic advantages of smooth transfer to individuals and states, improving articulation policy and practice is a matter of significant public interest. Effective articulation and transfer practices assure efficient use of public funds and foster education and social equity for those undertaking their postsecondary education at a community college, including a high percentage of minority students, working adults and others.

Economically, degree attainment and graduation, whether from a community college or a four-year college, are the pathways to better jobs and increased earnings. If these economic gains are to be realized, efficient transfer between institutions is an essential part of the process.

BACKGROUND

Community colleges have multiple programs to match their multiple missions. Central among these are transfer-oriented programs that do the following:

- Grant an associate in arts or associate in science degree upon completion (though transfer can and often does occur before the associate's degree is completed)

inside...

3 Collaboration Key to Improvement

6 Policy Options

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Grant employment-oriented occupational certificates (for programs less than two years in length) and an associate in applied science degree (for two-year programs). Though the primary aim of most occupational-technical programs is not transfer, the applicability of such programs and courses to bachelor's degrees is a growing issue.

Among the approximately six million students enrolled in community colleges, 25% are minority, 58% are women and 65% are enrolled part-time, combining their studies with full- or part-time jobs. The community college student population average age is 32, and includes increasing numbers of low-income, low-ability students. This is a nontraditional, higher-risk group of students than is found at most four-year colleges. These students' education commitments and aspirations can be fickle and changeable. Many are testing themselves in the less risky environment of a community college, often after prior education experiences that were less than satisfactory. Many are place-bound by family, job or other commitments and literally have no postsecondary options other than their local community college.

Of this diverse and problematic group, the question of how many students actually want to attend a four-year institution is difficult to answer. Approximately half of all students who enter postsecondary institutions begin their studies in community colleges, and 20-29% of those students transfer to four-year colleges, a percentage that many criticize as too low. A significant body of research suggests that students who initially enroll at community colleges are less likely to complete the bachelor's degree than students who begin their studies at four-year colleges, though this research tends to overlook the fact that many such students have no viable four-year college alternatives and must first attend a community college.

More recent studies suggest that once community college students successfully transfer to a four-year institution, they graduate at the same rate as students who begin at four-year colleges and attain job status and earnings equal to those students who started at and graduated from four-year institutions. These data seem to indicate the problems that prevent successful completion of the bachelor's degree usually arise prior to transfer or during the transfer process.

Not only are community college students' backgrounds diverse, so are their paths through higher education. Studies show that today's students typically progress through postsecondary education at irregular rates — starting, stopping, then returning — and along many different routes. Some proceed on a straight and steady course from high school to community college to four-year college to bachelor's degree. Others simultaneously attend a four-year institution and a community college, are enrolled in more than one community college or reverse transfer — from a four-year to a two-year and then back to a four-year college.

Articulation agreements are often designed with the traditional, steady, straightforward high school to community college to four-year college model in mind and have difficulty accommodating students' irregular coursetaking patterns. Courses accepted for transfer by one institution might not be accepted by another, or courses accepted at one point may not be accepted later when curriculum requirements change. Also, community college courses may be accepted by the four-year institution but not applied to the specific major or degree the student is pursuing. In addition, four-year institutions sometimes ignore formal processes and change course equivalencies unilaterally.

3

Tronie Rifkin is associate director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Improving articulation and increasing transfer is a complex task not likely to be resolved by state initiatives alone. The quality of interaction among state government and the various education sectors within each state is critical to the process. Here are some key elements:

- ***Collaboration: key to improved articulation and transfer.*** Researchers who have examined effective articulation and transfer practices emphasize the importance of faculty support for, and involvement in, the development of articulation agreements. Faculty from two- and four-year institutions must learn to work together constructively on curriculum development, articulation, transfer and other issues of mutual concern. Recommendations from this research stress the importance of frequent, ongoing meetings between two- and four-year college faculty within and among departments.

  For example, the success to date of the Illinois Articulation Initiative has been attributed largely to the state's emphasis on having two- and four-year faculty collaborate on the content of the statewide core general education curriculum that is the initiative's keystone. Illinois' emphasis on two- and four-year faculty as equal partners in developing the initiative forces collaboration to benefit all institutions.

  Collaboration also can extend in the opposite direction — between K-12 and postsecondary faculty. At one institution, college faculty worked with high school and junior high school teachers to help ensure that secondary school curricula and course content would prepare students for studies leading to transfer. Such outreach and intervention efforts at all levels of the education system are especially important for minority and nontraditional students.

- ***Articulation agreements.*** Since the 1960s, state involvement in articulation agreements has increased, but no single model has been pursued. Traditionally, formal articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions have been voluntary. In the majority of states, state or system transfer policies are in effect without being written into legislation. Both Hawaii, where community colleges are part of the state university system, and California, where they are not, use agreements between institutional sectors; that is, four-year institutions agree to recognize the community college general education core and to give full credit to students for courses taken and grades earned.

  Some states have legislated policies that specify curriculums and examinations — Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nevada, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Texas. These policies generally include a common course numbering system and/or a core general education curriculum.

  The Illinois Articulation Initiative is one of the most recent state efforts to improve articulation. The initiative, launched in 1993, sought to create a statewide General Education Core Curriculum to be implemented in 1998. The curriculum consists of 12 to 13 courses (37 to 41 semester credits) selected from five fields commonly found in general education programs: oral and written communication, mathematics, humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and physical and life sciences. Students who take this package of coursework are assured their credits will satisfy the general education requirements at the institution to which they transfer.

Though the ultimate outcome of the Illinois Articulation Initiative is unknown at this time, it appears to have an advantage over other articulation strategies such as common course numbering, voluntary agreements and policies that require completion of the associate's degree to transfer.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SNAPSHOT

Enrollment:	6 million students
Population:	25% minority 58% women 65% part-time average age 32
Percent of students who begin postsecondary education in community colleges:	50%
Number who transfer to four-year colleges:	20-29%

A statewide general education core removes the complexity of the common course numbering system. Matching course numbers at different institutions are convenient and simplify the process of determining course equivalencies. But unless broad articulation agreements covering all of the public two-year and four-year institutions are incorporated in the process, courses could carry the same number, be equivalent in content, but transfer differently to different institutions. General education requirements at four-year institutions can and do vary from institution to institution, and the same course may not be applied the same way at different institutions.

Similarly, graduation requirements at community colleges vary from institution to institution, and the existence of same-number courses at different community colleges does not guarantee equal applicability to graduation requirements. The strength of the core curriculum concept is that each institution agrees to honor the same set of courses as applicable to its general education requirements.

The Illinois initiative also attempts to address the problem of credits accepted at the institution versus credits applied to a major. For example, the University of Florida Business College will not accept preprofessional courses taken at a community college. The Illinois initiative includes a baccalaureate majors' curricula that outlines coursework for particular majors which is typically taken by students during their freshman and sophomore years. If students follow a prescribed major curriculum and complete the general education core curriculum, their credits in the major will transfer.

The initiative also recognizes that many students who transfer do so without the associate's degree. A recent study of community college transfer students at universities in 13 states revealed that only 37% attained that degree before transferring. Recognizing transfer students who have completed the general education core requirements, but not the associate's degree requirements, gives credit to community colleges as meeting the needs of transfer students, even if they do not graduate from the community college.

Two- and four-year institutions that negotiate arrangements on an individual basis spend a lot of time and money monitoring and keeping track of numerous articulation

agreements. For example, a Maryland community college had individual articulation agreements with more than 20 local and regional four-year institutions. At the system level, articulation agreements arranged on an individual institution basis without any statewide coordination or articulation database often present problems for students.

In some cases, however, individual institutional collaboration yields positive effects. Dual admissions programs adopted by institutions in Ohio, New Jersey and other states have the potential to increase the number of community college students who graduate with an associate's degree. New Jersey's Rutgers University guarantees junior status to community college students who fulfill requirements for the associate's degree. About 30% of the students at one community college who enrolled in the dual admission program from 1991 to 1995 eventually transferred to Rutgers.

Whether state-coordinated articulation initiatives are more effective than systemwide or individual voluntary agreements between institutions has not been well-documented. One study found policies proven effective in one state may be less effective in another because of such factors as expenditure levels, the structure of each state's higher education system, and differences in institutional services and expectations regarding access and student flow.

- ***Curriculum reform.*** Curriculum reform emphasizes strengthening course offerings, improving classroom teaching and raising expectations for student performance. Efforts to reform and develop curriculum often are tied to articulation in states with legal and formal systemwide policies that require some minimum general education credits to transfer, such as California, Georgia, Illinois and Virginia. Research suggests a relationship between curriculum development and student transfer. A recent study of 52 colleges found community colleges whose curricula included a broad range of liberal arts offerings had higher transfer rates than colleges with weaker transfer offerings.

Proposals to develop community college curricula to enhance transferability sometimes are criticized because they do not include occupational-technical programs. Little information is available about transfer of occupational-technical students, except that the number transferring with the associate of applied science degree has increased in recent years.

A "2 + 2" model for occupational-technical programs is used in some places. In a typical "2 + 2" program, students complete an associate of applied science degree at the community college. This program consists mostly of occupational-technical coursework but also includes some transferable general education coursework. At the four-year school, students then complete the rest of the general education coursework, along with more advanced occupational-technical courses.

Ensuring that occupational-technical programs at community colleges include a significant amount of high-

quality general education coursework may be the key to making them more acceptable for transfer, along with the existence of relevant, more advanced technical courses at the four-year institution.

- ***Student support services.*** Collaborative efforts and articulation agreements have little effect unless prospective transfer students have access to high-quality information, academic advising, counseling and other support services. Going to college is difficult and complicated, even for the well-prepared student. In addition to the academic challenges, there is much detailed planning and decisionmaking to be done. Community college transfer students have the added complications of dealing with multiple institutions, and the higher-risk students that are more numerous at community colleges are among the least prepared to make such decisions on their own.

  Well-established community college transfer centers — in states such as California and Illinois — provide a comprehensive and coordinated range of student services, including information on transfer opportunities and assistance in dealing with the admissions process of four-year institutions. The centers often keep track of their students' progress and coordinate services available from other campus sources.

- ***Technical support and research.*** Effective transfer programs benefit from a well-developed technical infrastructure that includes statewide student information and tracking systems, articulation databases and research on transfer. The most effective programs have all three and often are found in states where higher education is closely coordinated at the state agency level, for example, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Washington and Texas.

  Establishing information systems and collecting data on transfer are complicated by the lack of agreed-upon methods for measuring transfer. The measurement problems involve accurately identifying and tracking student goals and progress in the maelstrom of shifting intentions and irregular attendance that is typical of many community college students. Several different methods are in use, but none is universally accepted. This makes it difficult to establish valid benchmarks and reliably measure progress toward institutional, system and state goals.

- ***Institutional financial incentives for transfer.*** A number of states have suggested and, to some degree, implemented performance funding related to transfer. Examples include awarding additional money to two-year institutions whose students transfer at a high rate and/or to four-year institutions that accept a high number of transfers. Such schemes are attractive but can be problematic. Many current performance funding systems have technical problems related to equity, methodology and the degree of impact on institutional budgets. As performance funding systems evolve and become more technically sophisticated, many of these problems may be resolved, but at this time institutional financial incentives for transfer remain a promising, but still imperfect, practice.

III
POLICY OPTIONS

To be effective, articulation policies and practices must involve a network of constituents from the state to the university to the community college to the high school. The ultimate test of articulation and transfer effectiveness is getting community college students successfully through to the university. State directives, though necessary and important, may be limited in their effect and difficult to carry out, whereas state-encouraged and supported actions instituted at the system, and particularly the institutional level, may prove more effective overall. Some options to consider include:

1. **Streamline articulation.** Recognize and publicly acknowledge community colleges as equal partners with four-year institutions in developing and implementing articulation and transfer initiatives. Integrate the articulation system into the state higher education system so students who have met a set of requirements can transfer to and from any two- and four-year institutions in the state with or without an associate's degree. This might take the form of a common course numbering system, general education core, easily identifiable course equivalencies or dual-admissions programs. Policy and practice should be tailored to the state system structure; that is, policy and practice in states with community college systems that emphasize technical/vocational education should be different from states with comprehensive community colleges.

2. **Promote collaboration.** Encourage ongoing collaboration between two- and four-year institutions as well as between community colleges and high schools. Provide financial incentives for the development of collaborative strategies that promote transfer, such as programs that identify and encourage low-income, minority, part-time and reentry students to pursue a baccalaureate degree.

3. **Foster curriculum development.** Call upon faculty at both two- and four-year institutions to take primary responsibility for curriculum development. Require regional two- and four-year institutions to establish subject-area curriculum committees composed of both community college and four-year college faculty. Include occupational-technical faculty in curriculum development discussions.

4. **Bolster student support services.** Make arrangements for students to receive financial aid to attend four-year institutions. Allocate funds to maintain transfer centers at both two- and four-year colleges that provide: (1) counseling, student advising and mentoring, and (2) current and specific information on transfer opportunities including major requirements, electives, course availability and enrollment procedures at four-year institutions.

5. **Build technical support.** Provide funding to establish an integrated technical infrastructure that can support student information systems, articulation and transfer data from both two- and four-year institutions in the state. Include funding for maintenance of these systems at the district and institutional levels.

6. **Provide for research and evaluation.** Provide funding to carry out research and evaluation on the effectiveness of transfer and articulation. Based on reliable research, establish reasonable transfer goals. Agree upon a standard measure of transfer effectiveness to produce standardized annual transfer reports.

IV CONCLUSION

Although articulation and transfer polices are state concerns, improving articulation to increase transfer is not likely to be resolved by state initiatives alone, because state policies ultimately are implemented at the system and institutional levels. Thus collaborative efforts among state, system and institutional personnel are needed if the articulation and transfer process is to be improved significantly.

The payoff should be a substantial increase in the number of bachelor's degree-seeking students who ultimately attain their goal, especially among those whose only viable option for any kind of higher education is to undertake a substantial portion of their studies at a community college.

© Copyright 2000 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965 to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education.

It is ECS policy to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

ECS is pleased to have other organizations or individuals share its materials with their constituents. To request permission to excerpt part of this publication either in print or electronically, please write or fax Josie Canales, Education Commission of the States, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; fax: 303-296-8332.

Copies of this paper are available for $4 plus postage and handling from the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; 303-299-3692; fax: 303-296-8332; or jvey@ecs.org. Ask for No. CC-00-5. ECS accepts prepaid orders, MasterCard, American Express and Visa. All sales are final.

Generous discounts are available for bulk orders of single publications. They are: 10-24 copies, 10% discount; 25-49 copies, 20% discount; 50-74 copies, 30% discount; 75-99 copies, 40% discount; and 100+ copies, 50% discount.

Postage and handling:

If your order totals: Up to $10.00, add $3.00 postage and handling; $10.01-$25.00, $4.25; $25.01-$50.00, $5.75; $50.01-$75.00, $8.50; $75.01-$100.00, $10.00; and over $100.00, $12.00.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE POLICY CENTER

This policy paper is produced as part of ECS' *Critical Roles for Community Colleges* project, funded by the Metropolitan Life Foundation.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE